

THE ASSOCIATION OF KANSAS THEATRE

by Jed H. Davis

When the current President of the Association of Kansas Theatre asked me to write up a history of the organization, I agreed to undertake the job, realizing that my qualifications as historian were based solely on the fact that I had lived through those natal pains personally. But, of course, memory grows vague on details if documentation has disappeared, or perhaps never existed, some important facts be omitted, or worse, distorted.

So I have entitled this document "Some Perspectives," in the hope that others who were involved in those important early events will come forth, make corrections and even write their own versions.

Origins

It was a blustery weekend in late February, 1974, when the University of Kansas played host to the Central Region's American College Theatre Festival. Excitement and collegiality, as well as snow and frigid temperatures, filled the atmosphere in Lawrence as an unusually large group of Kansas theatre folks found themselves in the same city to celebrate their art with compatriots from Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska. The Festival had been extensively promoted with area high schools, community theatres and junior colleges as an unusual educational opportunity for students at all levels with workshop credit offered--a promotion that succeeded admirably in bringing Lawrence people with just the right variety of interests and even a predisposition to organize a state body. I had recently completed a term as President of the American Theatre Association, and was spoiling for a chance to get Kansas in on the ground floor of a nationwide surge of activity which ATA acknowledged had the potential to invalidate the most recent restructuring of the national body and force an accommodation for the states in ATA's governance.

So, while the snows swirled, about twenty people representing different kinds of

of theatre programs assembled in a classroom of Murphy Hall in response to a call for posted signs; and we agreed to proceed toward the establishment of a state affiliate for Kansas.¹

A "Steering Committee" came into being by its own decree. It consisted of Preston Sisk, a doctoral student at K.U. who assumed the function of executive secretary; Dr. Norman Fedder, professor of theatre at Kansas State University in Manhattan; Dr. Lloyd Anton Frerer, theatre professor at Ft. Hays State College;² Sr. Mary Flynn, professor of theatre at the College of St. Mary, Leavenworth; George Mastick, director of theatre at Neosho County Community College in Chanute; Paul Schreiber, teacher at Coffeyville-Field-Kindley High School; Terryl Asla, doctoral student at K.U.; and Dr. Jed Davis, director of theatre at K.U., who was elected chairperson. The committee's first meeting was held in Murphy Hall on the K.U. campus, March 1974.

At the second formative meeting, held in April, Lloyd Frerer handed over his personal \$5 check to Preston Sisk and became the first dues-paying member of AKT, which at that point was named the Association of Kansas Theatres. Early communications indicate that an undergraduate student at Ft. Hays State, Terry Weber, had joined the group, was appointed public relations director, and was already issuing releases for the new organization. Discussions at these meetings centered on activities and functions the AKT could undertake; and a constitutional subcommittee began work on a charter early in April.

The "Constitutional Meeting" was announced for April 27, at which time the subcommittee met to polish and approve a document based on the charters of several state theatre organizations that had been forwarded by Paul Antonie Distler, Associate Vice President for Administration. The draft of AKT's constitution was mailed to the Steering Committee on May 1, with all but one member indicating approval. The objections of George Mastick were sufficiently persuasive that the Steering Committee agreed to modify the draft according to the proposal submitted on Mastick's behalf by the chairperson on May 30. At the August convention of ATA, the Association of Kansas Theatre was officially recognized by the Board of Directors, and AKT can

into being as the Kansas state branch of ATA.³ In October, the Steering Committee was dissolved in favor of an Executive Committee pro-Tem, which held its first meeting on the campus of Kansas State University, November 2, 1974.

Structure

What sort of creature had been born? Intentionally its structure was kept simple. In brief, AKT's governing body, called the Executive Committee, included representatives of each major theatrical field included in ATA's divisions: university/college theatre, children's theatre, community theatre, secondary school theatre, Army theatre. In addition, AKT included divisions of religious and recreation theatre (combined with Army), professional theatre (which in ATA is partially represented by the University/Resident Theatre Association--U/RTA), and community and junior college theatre. In the first draft of the constitution, all but the community and junior college divisions were represented on the AKT Executive Committee; but on recommendation, the seventh chair was added. The officers consisted of a president, a vice-president, an executive secretary-treasurer, and all seven divisional chairpersons.

From the beginning, AKT has had the benefit of strong and consistent staff involvement. Preston Sisk, our first Executive Secretary-Treasurer, was instrumental in establishing the organization, determining policy, and administering the fledgling body's affairs. Sisk made sure that the American Theatre Student League (ATSL) was represented at the first convention by its national president, William Gleason. After Sisk's departure from the state, his "Student Representative" spot on the Executive Committee passed to John Boldenow, an undergraduate at Emporia State Teacher's College. However, there was no replacement when Boldenow's term expired.⁴ Other students from Kansas colleges were, of course, instrumental in getting things started, some in fact, graduating into divisional chairs on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors.

Membership has always been open to any individual or group which supported the purposes of the organization. Greatly condensed, these purposes were stated as a). promoting the highest quality theatre production, teaching, research, and

later amendment) management; b). to unite individuals and groups in Kansas in order to encourage all levels of theatrical production and associated activities, and to facilitate communication among members; and c). to serve as the voice of ATA in the state.

Over the years, changed circumstances brought changes in the constitution, mainly in the composition of the governing body. Within two years (by March, 1976), the division of Religious, Recreation and Army Theatre was merged with Community Theatre; and by September of 1978, there was a mutually agreeable merger of the University and College division with the Community and Junior College division. Both changes were reflected in constitutional amendments adopted March 10, 1980. In the 1980 revisions, an Executive Committee, consisting of the officers (now designated as the President, President-Elect, Secretary-Treasurer, and Past President) was established separately from the Board of Directors which assumed the duties originally assigned to the Executive Committee.

A set of By-laws, readily amended by the Executive Committee (later the Board), lists kinds, terms and rights of members; terms, duties and election methods of officers and division chairpersons; the methods of appointing committees and their functional limitations.

Only the President-Elect is voted upon by the entire AKT membership. Two candidates are submitted by an appointed nominating committee for election by mail ballot in February of alternate years. The President-Elect automatically succeeds to the Presidency after two years. The Executive Secretary-Treasurer (now the Secretary-Treasurer) is appointed by the Executive Committee/Board for a two-year term. In most years, this appointment was made from among colleagues of the President's home institution. Chairpersons of the several divisions are elected by those divisions in a manner prescribed by each one; but if a division is not clearly organized or of a sufficient number of members, the Executive Committee/Board may determine the manner of election.

A table indicating the Association's leadership since inception follows on the next page. It should be noted that succession of officers and divisional chairpersons

ASSOCIATION OF KANSAS THEATRE, INC.

OFFICERS AND DIVISION CHAIRPERSONS

1975 - 1983

	President	President-Elect	(Executive) Secretary-Treasurer	At Large	Children's Theatre	Community Theatre	Professional Theatre	College & University	Secondary School	Community & Jr. Col.	Religious Recreation & Army	Student Representative
Feb-Mar 1974-75	Jed Davis (Lawrence)	James Kriley (Emporia)	Preston Sisk (Lawrence)	T. Asla James (Lawrence)	Nicol Sr. Mary (KS City)	Nelson Stump (Salina)	Wesley VanTassel (Wichita)	Lloyd Frerer (Hays)	Eldon Evans (Shaw. Mis.)	George Mastick (Chanute)	Norman Fedder (Manhattan)	Preston Sisk
1975-76	James Kriley	Lloyd Frerer	Ronald Frederickson (Emporia)	(Leavenw'th)	James Nicol	Twink Lynch (Topeka)	Wesley VanTassel	Norman Callison (Winfield)	Shirley Windhorst (Minneapolis)	George Mastick	Norman Fedder	John Boldenow (Emporia)
1976-77	Lloyd Frerer	Ronald Frederickson	Suzanne Trauth (Hays)		Phil Grecian (Topeka)	Twink Lynch	John Holly (Wichita)	Joyce Cavarozzi (Wichita)	Shirley Windhorst	Kevin Alexander (Iola)	(division merged with Boldenow Community Theatre after 3/76)	John
1977-78	Lloyd Frerer	Ronald Frederickson	Michael Pearl (Hays)	Exec. Director	Charlotte Dodson (Lawrence)	Twink Lynch	John Holly	Joyce Cavarozzi	Nadine Charlsen (Wichita)	Kevin Alexander		
1978-79	Ronald Frederickson	Joyce Cavarozzi	Roger Moon (Emporia)	Twink Lynch (1/79)	Charlotte Dodson	Mernie Pritchard (McPherson)	Veda Rogers (Vassar)	Piet Knetsch (Lindsborg)	Nadine Charlsen	Kevin Alexander		
1979-80	Ronald Frederickson	Joyce Cavarozzi	Roger Moon	Twink Lynch	Charlotte Mason	Mernie Pritchard	Veda Rogers	Piet Knetsch	Nadine Charlsen		(division merged with College and University division after 9/78)	
1980-81	Joyce Cavarozzi	Piet Knetsch	Connie Menninger (Topeka)	Twink Lynch	Kat Matassarin (Wichita)	Marsha Stewart (Salina)	Jeff Corrick (Hutchinson)	Andrew Tsubaki (Lawrence)	Nadine Charlsen			
1981-82	Joyce Cavarozzi	Piet Knetsch	Connie Menninger	Twink Lynch	Kat Matassarin, Laura Jones (Emporia), Sharon Sikes (Wichita)	Marsha Stewart	Jeff Corrick	Andrew Tsubaki	Lois Griffing (Wichita)			
1982-83	Piet Knetsch	Nadine Charlsen	John Lehman (Emporia)	Twink Lynch	Sharon Sikes	Mary Doveton (Lawrence)	Mike Hostetler (Wichita)	Stephen Shapiro (Hays)	Jan Eaton (Derby)			

Note: The immediate Past President remained on the Executive Committee (and Board) since 1976, although not officially prior to the Constitutional revisions of March, 1980.

has followed a regular progression according to the By-laws. One irregularity occurred in 1976 when James Kridex, AKT President, left the state for an appointment in Montana, at which time President-Elect Lloyd Frerer, having served only a year in that office, assumed the Presidency. The Executive Committee appointed Hugh McCloskey of Washburn University in Topeka to fulfill the function of Convention Program person for 1977, a responsibility normally assigned to the President-Elect. There has been some irregularity in the length of divisional chairpersons' terms of office in the years; but this irregularity has been largely rooted in the nature of the division and the manner of selecting successors.

A major tenet of the original formative committee was that every effort was made to use existing organizations in AKT's structure rather than to introduce new agencies. Thus, the Children's Theatre division accepted as its first two chairpersons individuals who were the elected Kansas chairmen of MINK (Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas), vestigial regional structure of the Children's Theatre Association of America (CTAA), division of ATA. MINK, unfortunately, was in a decline pattern because CTAA/ATA's 1972 restructuring had mandated not a four-state but a seven-region, including, in addition to the MINK states, Minnesota and the Dakotas. In 1977, MINK's contribution of a Kansas chairman had ended, in effect passing to the obligation to structure its own children's theatre division.

In the case of the Community Theatre division, a firm structure already existed in the Kansas Community Theatre Conference (KCTC), a body that was established in the early 1960's. Its 1974 President, Nelson Stump, a member of AKT's Executive Committee Pro-Tem, was able to persuade his Board to join AKT and become the Community Theatre division, even merging its dues structure. The President of KCTC continues to sit on AKT's Board, and that division is a model of regularity in its succession of chairpersons.

The Secondary School Theatre division initially relied on organizational ties with the Kansas Speech Association, a group that consists largely of high school teachers; but leaders of that organization apparently felt AKT's competition for time and effort. Whatever the reason, the Secondary School division, at first o

nominally represented at AKT functions, was obliged to set up its own system of building a program. With some inconsistency, the Kansas Thespian organization has emerged as the major agency for cooperation. Vigorous programming in this division originating with its dynamic chairpersons, has been responsible for a healthy growth and influence on the state theatre scene.

The division of Religious, Recreation and Army Theatre, probably unique to Kansas during the few years it operated, had its religious drama roots in the state branch of a relatively new national organization called the Association of Religious Communities, the Arts and the American Revolution. When you put a K for Kansas on the front of that, the acronym becomes KARCAAR. Under Norman Fedder's leadership, that organization was engaged in many far-reaching projects; and it seemed fitting that AKT include them under the state organization's umbrella. While these activities continued, the Executive Committee of AKT eventually agreed, on Dr. Fedder's recommendation, to subsume the work under the Community Theatre division.

The divisions of Professional, College and University, and Community and Junior College all were obliged to establish their own structures and systems of electing successive chairpersons. By mid-1978, however, the Community and Junior College people found that they did not have sufficient representation to carry on as a group distinct from the College and University body; so the two mutually agreed to merge. The two remaining divisions have thrived in exemplary fashion, producing for the parent AKT a regular succession of Association's leaders.

A gigantic step forward was taken on January 1, 1979, when AKT's Executive Director assumed her newly-created office. The goal of hiring such a person to act on AKT's behalf wherever required had been established as a first priority at the 1978 convention; and by that fall, Twink Lynch, former chairperson of the Community Theatre division and national leader in ACTA, was selected.⁵ The initial terms of appointment were half-time for eight months (January through August), at a salary \$5000 plus \$1000 for expenses.⁶ Duties parallel those of ATA's Executive Director including such matters as convention planning, membership contacts, funding develop-

ment, maintenance of archives and an information center, and the pursuit of contact with other state and national arts groups. From the beginning, this position has been partially funded by the Kansas Arts Commission.

Governance systems designed and implemented by dedicated people thus resulted in a state-wide structure that was in many respects a model for similar groups throughout the country.

Conventions

A major portion of the life of any theatre organization is centered on its annual conventions. From AKT's inception, its leadership has sought to correlate the meetings with those of allied groups. After considering several possibilities, the committee decided to hold AKT's first convention with the Associated Community Arts Councils of Kansas (ACACK), with KARCAAR and with KCTC. The place was the Downtown Holiday Inn in Topeka, and the date was April 18 and 19, 1975. Cross-programming was offered by ACACK at the Ramada Inn Downtown. At this convention, the first auditions were held under the aegis of the Professional Theatre division, a convention feature that has been repeated and expanded in scope each year.⁷

As can be seen from the following Summary, AKT annual meetings have regularly featured not only festivals by the Community Theatre (FACT), the Children's Theatre and High School Theatre, but also cooperative programming with the Kansas Arts Commission (KAC), Thespians, MINK, and, most recently, with the Mid America Theatre Conference.⁸ A pattern has emerged whereby festivals of community theatre and children's theatre are staged alternate years.

AKT CONVENTION SUMMARY

1975	Topeka, Downtown Holiday Inn	April 18, 19	with ACACK, KARCAAR, KCTC Auditions*
1976	Wichita, Holiday Inn Plaza	March 12-14	with KAC support
1977	Topeka, Ramada Inn Downtown	March 4-6	with KAC, ACACK, KARCAAR, MINK, and FACT
1978	Wichita, Holiday Inn Plaza	March 10-12	with High School Theatre Festival; first Auditions for College/Univ. scholarships
1979	Wichita, Holiday Inn Plaza	March 9-11	with Thespians, FACT, and f Children's Theatre Festival
1980	Wichita, Holiday Inn Plaza	Feb. 29-Mar. 2	with High School Festival, Children's Theatre Festival Thespians
1981	Salina, Marymount College & Salina Community Theatre	March 13-15	with Thespians, FACT
1982	Kansas City, Ramada Inn Central	March 19-21	with Mid America Theatre Conference
	(A separate Children's Theatre Festival was held at the Wichita Children's Theatre, May 1)		
1983	Emporia, Emporia State Univ.	March 11-13	with FACT

*held at all subsequent mee

Persons from the national scene have graced AKT's conventions ever since the first one. In 1975, Austin Henry, ATA's Associate Executive Director, was on hand to launch the new ship. William Gleason, President of ATSL, was present to ensure continued student involvement, and Mark Samuels, a New York actor, led improvisation workshops. The 1976 meeting featured Tony Distler, the first of a series of ATA Presidents-Elect; Sherwood Lohrey, FACT-winning director from Memphis; noted New York scene designer, Eldon Elder; Jack Eddelman, New York director; and Coleman Jennings of the University of Texas-Austin, President of CTAA. A glance through other programs reveals other "notable names" that have added prestige, good humor, and much-valued inspiration to our meetings: Dale Huffington, David Young, Mordecai Gorelik, Nat Eek, Bob Kelly, Julia Curtis, Carveth Osterhaus, Milly Barranger, Geraldine Braxton Siks, Jeanne Adams Wray, Robert Patrick, Jeff Neugebauer, David Gooder, Dan Given,

Charles Jones, Jean Korf, Robert Gard, Aurand Harris, Richard Nichols, Sid Friedman, George Murdock, Cliff Baker, Robert Wills, John Ezell and Larry Clark. All have helped keep the state conventions in effect close-to-home mini-nationals.

The first convention in 1975 was the only AKT meeting that has been held without the financial support of the Kansas Arts Commission (KAC). For the 1975-76 fiscal year, KAC granted \$500 to support publication and distribution of The Marquee, AKT's official newsletter. The following year, they approved a grant of \$650 for the 1977 annual meeting, a sum that was returned when the convention showed a profit. The following year, we were granted a similar amount; but for 1978-79, KAC subsidized half of the new Executive Director's salary: \$2500. In 1980-81, not only was a similar amount awarded for the Executive Director but additional amounts of \$750 for The Marquee and \$750 for the state FACT were granted. In 1981-82, \$2083 was forthcoming for the Executive Director; and for 1982-83 a block program award was given in the amount of \$4000, at least partly to help break down barriers for the handicapped in member programs. Strong, steady assistance from the KAC has obviously helped AKT to realize its goals and enhance its services to members and the state arts scene.

Since conventions are the focus of the Association's active year, it seems appropriate in this section to mention something about membership. Originally, membership categories were kept simple and cheap: students were enrolled for \$3, regular individuals for \$5, and organizations for \$15. This dues structure maintained until 1979, when it was increased to \$5, \$10, and \$20 to \$50, depending on an organization total budget. At that time, the membership year, at first coinciding with the calendar year, was changed to begin in September. By 1981, special categories of individual membership were added: contributing for \$25, sustaining for \$50, and angel for \$100. Last year (1982), the rates were raised to \$8 for students, \$15 for a regular individual, and \$30 to \$60 for organizations.

At these rates, AKT's first roster of members, compiled immediately after the 1975 convention in Topeka, listed 23 students, 89 individuals, and 20 organizations, for a total of 132. A report published in the May, 1981, Marquee listed 24 students, 129 regular and contributing individuals, and 46 organizations, for a total of 199.

While growth in numbers over the six-year period is not spectacular, the figures probably represent a substantial portion of theatre groups and concerned individuals in the state.

Programs and Projects

A number of AKT's programs have already been mentioned. Certainly one of the most important of these is regular publication of The Marquee, a newsletter which was first distributed to members and interested parties in February of 1975, and ever since has served as the Association's principal communication link. In keeping with the "AKT" reference, the first five years of publication were designated by "Acts" and "Scenes" rather than by the more regular Volumes and Issue numbers. However, when it came time for "ACT VI" (October, 1979), the leadership rebelled, claiming such a designation called forth the image of a play of "excessive length, or a playwright with problems of structure," and ordered The Marquee to be henceforth catalogued in the standard way. Regular features are official notices, convention and other program items, news of people and programs, production schedules, articles about division projects, and "state of the union" observations by the President. The Marquee was edited in early years by the various Secretaries, but since 1981 it has been issued from the AKT Central Office in Topeka by the Executive Director.

Each division has been active promoting its own special projects and the interests of its members. The University and College division has held a separate meeting in the fall of each year since 1975, and has undertaken to encourage audience exchange among member schools by means of complimentary or reduced-rate tickets wherever a membership card is presented. This division very early expressed concern for up-grading certification requirements for high school drama teachers in Kansas, the exchange of production respondents or commentators, and the perceived discrimination against theatre artists in matters of promotion and tenure. Two Directories containing the names and specializations of all theatre faculty members in the state have been issued--one in 1979, the other in 1982--to facilitate the process of exchanging respondents.

An Odyssey to all community theatres in the state, conducted by Twink Lynch and Pam Bosanko, an intern with the Kansas Arts Commission, during the fall and winter of 1975-76, led to a plan whereby Kansas was subdivided into six districts. KCAC adopted the plan in March, 1976, appointing chairpersons in each district to be responsible for implementing an intensive communication network as well as representing their districts on the KCAC Board. Much of the Community Theatre's program has centered on the Festival of American Community Theatre (FACT), both when the state festival is part of AKT's annual meeting and when its regional is held in the state. Kansas community theatres have progressed into the regional and national festivals as well, and when this happens there is great excitement generated for this program.

The Children's Theatre division has focused its sights primarily on the biennial festival held at convention time, although its divisional meetings also register concern for promoting creative drama in the elementary schools and recreation programs in Kansas.

The Secondary School division has generated much interest and enthusiasm by staging festivals at the annual meetings and by encouraging Thespian involvement in cooperative convention programming. In 1977, it adopted the six-district plan initiated by the Community Theatre division, appointing chairpersons in each district to facilitate communication.

A cross-divisional feature of AKT was begun at the 1980 convention when the Board initiated the first members into the Kansas Theatre Hall of Fame. Ramona Carl, wife of the Governor, was on hand to give out the pieces of "Yellow Brick Road" to recipients Karl Bruder of Emporia; Robert Gard of Madison, Wisconsin, a native of Hola; Irene Vickers Baker of Wichita; Peggy Greene of Topeka; and Jed Davis of Lawrence. The class of 1981 was initiated at the Salina conference, and consisted of Mary Jane Teall of Wichita and George Murdock of Hollywood. At this same meeting, certificates of Achievement were awarded to the Barn Players of Overland Park, the Vas Playhouse, the Hutchinson Repertory Company, the Music Theatre of Wichita, and the Salina Community Theatre for special services to the senior citizens or hearing impaired.

In 1982 there were no new initiates into the Hall of Fame, but Certificates were awarded to Claudia Leonesio and the Recreation Services for the Handicapped of the Hutchinson Recreation Commission, to the Lawrence Community Theatre for productions of original plays, to Judy Hillman for work with hearing-impaired Wichita high school students, to Jack Wright of Lawrence for The Sage of Emporia tour, to Theatre for Young America of Overland Park for "Babylonian Encounter," and to Andrew Tsubaki of Lawrence for work with Chhau Folk Dances of India.

When it all began, there were few who thought that Kansas, in the heartland of America, would have enough interested people to sustain a thriving theatre organization! After all, tradition had it that we were surrounded by a "cultural desert." But we found there was a healthy amount of activity and, most important, perhaps more than our share of dedicated, enthusiastic leaders within our borders who were anxious to make a contribution to the state arts scene.

NOTES

¹ Unfortunately there seems to be no record of those who attended this meeting. The date was probably February 22, 1974. I recall eloquent support for an organization expressed by Dr. Karl Bruder of Emporia.

Henceforth in this account, events are documented by various letters, reports issues of The Marquee, or other materials found in my personal files or in the files of the society in Topeka.

² The state "Colleges" at Ft. Hays, Emporia, and Pittsburg all changed their titles to "University" sometime after 1974.

³ AKT was the twelfth state organization to be recognized by ATA.

⁴ A constitutional amendment adopted at the April, 1975, business meeting placed a "Student Representative" on the Executive Committee; but after 1977, the position was unfilled. The specification was removed as part of the March, 1980, revisions.

⁵ Dr. Lynch was reported to be either the third or the fourth paid state theatre association executive director in the United States.

⁶ The Fall, 1981, Marquee reported a 10-month budgeted salary for 1980-81 at \$6250, with \$900 additional for expenses.

⁷ The first Auditions were held in the Topeka Room of the Topeka Savings Association Building. Unfortunately, some careless participants burned cigarette scars in the tile floor, resulting in some nervous exchanges between TSA and AKT executives.

Ultimately we were assured that no charges would be assessed for the damages, we got off with only a mild reprimand.

⁸ MATC, the seven-state ATA regional organization, came into being in 1972 did not hold its first convention until March 28-30, 1980.

November, 1982